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BOOK REVIEWS

THE CLASSIC POINT OF VIEW, By KENYON COX. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, Publishers. Price \$1.50 net.

This book, which is by all odds one of the most notable treatises on art published for many a long day, comprises six lectures on painting delivered, on the Scammon foundation, at the Art Institute of Chicago, in the spring of the present year. They are, the author says, a "detailed and explicit confession of artistic faith"—"a statement of what one painter believes and hopes and fears with regard to painting; of what he takes to be the malady of modern art, and of where he looks for the remedy for it." This, in itself, would give the work dignity and interest were it inherently lacking in these qualities, which it is not. Mr. Cox addresses himself to "the young artists who have, to some extent, the future of American art in their hands," and to the general public whose influence upon art, through patronage and appreciation, is strongly felt. Because of the latter class of readers he has avoided "technical jargon," and spoken plainly and to the point. "The Classic Spirit" he defines as "the disinterested search for perfection; the love of reasonableness and self-control; above all, the love of permanence of continuity." Thus in successive chapters he endeavors to show how link by link may be added to the chain of tradition without breaking the chain. In dealing with the subject in art, design, or composition, drawing, light and shade, and color, and, finally, technique, the writer points out our dependence upon tradition, while at the same time indicating the possibility of complete freedom and play of individuality. By "Classic Spirit" he does not by any means intend to refer to the Classic School, but rather to the stream which was continuous until toward the end of the 18th century—a unanimity of effort and conviction among all great artists. Mr. Cox deals with big subjects in a big way, but with a frankness which is delightful. Not only what he says, but the way he says it, is worth remembering. "The primary business of painting," he

says, "is to create a beautiful surface, beautifully divided into interesting shapes, enlivened with noble lines, varied with lovely and harmonious colors. Its secondary business is to remind the spectator of things he has seen and admired in nature, and to create the illusion of truth." The reasons he ascribes for the reproach attached to-day to the so-called "story-telling" picture are: that painters have told stories that were too trivial, have told stories that were ill-fitted for pictorial narration, and have told them badly. Of the ultra-modern art represented by the neo-impressionists and the post-impressionists he professes little regard, characterizing the majority of it as "sheer madness," but of the promise of art in America he writes hopefully and with vital faith. In one place he says, referring to a recent visit abroad, "The more I saw of the great masterpieces of the Renaissance the more encouraged I felt as to the validity of the best work I had seen at home, and the more I found myself saying, 'This is what we have been trying to do.'" The reason for our conservatism, he explains, is that we are a new people, not yet wearied of the old and fine things which older peoples have had in greater abundance and are therefore not under "the necessity of discovering a new spice for a jaded appetite." A gain, he rather startles the reader by professing a sympathy with "the public which demands sanity and sobriety of the artist," and with "the artist who strives, without compromising his artistic ideal, to produce something which the public wants." "After all," he questions, "why should not art be popular?"—reminding his reader that the greatest art has always been so, including that of Phidias, Titian and Raphael. There is but one fault to be found with this book and that is trifling—the way in which the illustrations are scattered irrelevantly through the volume in no wise keeping step, as it were, with the text. They are good illustrations, however, and will undoubtedly be found by some to lend interest. The book, itself, cannot be too highly commended for its thoughtful and generally significant qualities.